

# THE FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

## The Fall of the Western Roman Empire

*N.B. The following syllabus is written for a 6-week summer term, taught in 2016*

Why did the Western Roman Empire end? This question has fascinated – and confounded – historians for 1500 years. Last century, one historian found 210 separate published causes of the empire’s end, ranging from Christianity to Paganism, Capitalism to Communism, and everyone’s favorite: lead pipes. Why do scholars continue to debate the causes of this historical event, and how can we begin to make sense of a historiographical problem that has frustrated so many generations of historians and archaeologists?

This course examines the most recent debates surrounding the end of the Western Empire: migration, economic collapse, social and cultural transformation, and civil war. This class will examine the reasons behind scholarly disagreement: clashing theoretical paradigms, different types of sources, and divergent methods of analyzing the meaning and implications of these materials. Students will become familiar with these arguments, and will learn to evaluate their strengths and reasons for disagreement; they will learn how these debates influence modern understandings of contemporary declines and falls; and they will propose, by the end of the class, their own answer to the million-dollar question: why did the empire end?

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course will teach you how to:

- Understand and explain current historical debates about the events and causes of the end of the Western Roman Empire.
- Understand how historians’ evidence, questions, and models influence their interpretation of historical events.
- Evaluate textual, archaeological, osteological, economic, and sociological approaches to historical questions.
- Understand and critically examine references to Roman history in contemporary media and politics.

### **Assigned Texts**

Sections of the following books will be assigned, and are recommended for you to purchase or request through interlibrary loan:

Bowes, *Houses and Society in the Later Roman Empire*  
Brown, *Power and Persuasion*  
Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*  
Kulikowski, *Rome’s Gothic Wars*  
Ward-Perkins, *The fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*

Assigned chapters from these books, and additional required and/or recommended articles, will be uploaded to Canvas ( <http://elearning.ufl.edu> ).

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Online Discussion Posts / class participation	(30 points)
Timeline quiz	(5 points)

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In-class presentation	(10 points)
Op-ed analysis paper	(25 points)
Final Paper	(30 points)
<b>(100 points total for course)</b>	

### ONLINE DISCUSSION POSS

DUE: **10:00AM** each day before coming to class

Before each classroom meeting, students will write a brief (1-2 paragraphs, approximately 10 sentences each) summary of the assigned daily reading(s). This summary will be posted in the online discussion thread (Canvas) by 10am before class meets. This summary is informal (ie, not graded for style; just content), and should describe the central argument of the text and the evidence with which it was supported.

Summaries are graded satisfactory (100), incomplete (50), and unsatisfactory (0). Students may drop the lowest three summary scores without penalty (ie, you have three free skips).

**You are not required to submit a response on the day when you make your in-class presentation.**

### CLASS PARTICIPATION

This class will include daily discussions of the assigned readings. Students are expected to participate in these discussions by listening carefully to their classmates, asking questions, and giving thoughtful comments and responses.

### POP QUIZZES

If the class regularly fails to complete the assigned readings and/or reading responses, the instructor reserves the right to give unannounced pop quizzes in class.

### TIMELINE QUIZ

At the end of the first week, students will complete a quiz on the important dates and events surrounding the collapse of Roman imperial power in the west in the fourth, fifth, and early sixth centuries. While this class' primary focus will be on understanding historians' attempts to explain these events, it is important that we all understand, at the beginning of the course, the basic timeline in which these events took place.

This will be further explained in a handout.

### IN CLASS PRESENTATION

Each student will be asked, either individually or in pairs, to give a ten-minute presentation to the class in which the student(s) will summarize the argument made in a scholarly book chapter or journal article which their classmates have not had the opportunity to read, taken from the list of recommended / additional readings on the syllabus. Students are **strongly encouraged** to meet with the instructor several days before giving their presentation to receive feedback and suggestions to improve their presentation.

### OP-ED ANALYSIS PAPER

News editorials frequently draw analogies between modern events and the fall of the Roman empire. This assignment will ask you to critically evaluate one such article (from a list provided), using the knowledge and articles / chapters we have read and discussed in class.

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More information about the assignment will be given in a separate handout.

### FINAL EXAM PAPER

The final exam will be a take-home paper due on the last day of class. In this paper, you will be asked to synthesize material from the six weeks' readings into an argument which explains your own evaluation of the causes of the end of the Western Roman empire.

More information about the assignment will be given in a separate handout.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### Late papers / makeups

Late papers and makeup assignments will only be accepted by prior arrangement (before the deadline has passed), or under *exceptional* circumstances.

### Paper rewrites

Submitted papers may be revised in response to instructor feedback, at which point they will be re-graded. Papers which carefully respond to feedback will often earn a higher grade.

Re-written papers must be re-submitted within one week of being returned. They must be accompanied by a one-page explanation of the revisions made (including justification for disagreement with the instructor's recommended revisions).

### Attendance

Attendance in class is required. **Two unexcused absences will be permitted.** Students with more than two unexcused absences will lose 1% from their final grade for each absence. Excused absences may be granted for special circumstances, as outlined in the undergraduate catalog: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> . Excused absences should, whenever possible, be arranged in advance. Students may be asked to provide documentation for excused absences.

### Class etiquette

Please arrive on time (if you are running late, please try not to slam the door as a courtesy to your fellow classmates). Cell phones, tablets, and laptops should not be used in class except for reading assigned texts and taking notes. Students who use electronics to text, check social networking apps, or play games will be asked to remove themselves from the classroom so as not to distract their fellow classmates.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism, which is the attempt to claim someone else's writing as your own, is cheating, dishonest, and a violation of university policy and is strictly prohibited. Students who plagiarize will fail the assignment, and will be reported to the university for further disciplinary action. For more information on UF's policies on plagiarism and cheating, see the Student Conduct & Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/> .

### University policy on accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) ) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

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## Course evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu> . Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/> .

## HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352 392- 1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- **Counseling and Wellness Center:** <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- **Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS):** Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

**University Police Department:** 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).  
<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Setting the stage

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**Monday: Syllabus and introduction**

**Tuesday: The Roman empire: a crash course**

Required Reading: Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire* (chapter 1)

**Wednesday: Rome's barbarians**

Required Reading: Tacitus, *Germania*; Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book* (chapter 2)

**Thursday: Third Century Crisis, fourth century revival: Diocletian and Constantine**

Required Reading: Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom* (chapter 2)

**Friday: Theorizing 'decline' and 'fall'**

Required Reading: Rogers, *Late Roman Towns in Britain* (chapter 2); Cameron, 'History and the Individuality of the Historian: The Interpretation of Late Antiquity'

### Week 2: Barbarian invasions

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**Monday: NO CLASS (July 4<sup>th</sup>)**

**Tuesday: The traditional story: Barbarians ruined everything!**

Required Reading: Ward-Perkins, *The fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (chapters 2, 3, 4)

Additional: E.A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (chapter 6)

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### **Wednesday: What do we mean by barbarian 'tribes'? Debates about barbarian identity**

Required Reading: Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars* (chapters 2 and 3)

Additional: Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* (chapter: Germanism); Fewster, 'Visions of National Greatness'

### **Thursday: Barbarians, or Roman soldiers?**

Required Reading: Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy* (chapter 8); Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* (pages 101-110)

Additional: Arnold, 'Theoderic's Invincible Mustache'; Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy* (Appendix 4)

### **Friday: Barbarians, rhetoric, and reality**

Required Reading: Halsall, 'Two worlds become one', Von Rummel, 'The fading power of images'

Additional: Pohl, 'Telling the difference'; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* (pages 422-447)

## **Week 3: Economic change**

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### **Monday: The traditional story: The empire's economic collapse was a tragedy!**

Required Reading: Ward-Perkins, *The fall of Rome and the end of civilization* (chapters 5, 6, 7)

Additional: Fleming, 'Recycling in Britain after the fall of Rome's metal economy'

### **Tuesday: Economic models of the Roman economy**

Required Reading: Scheidel, 'In search of Roman economic growth'

Additional: Wilson, 'A forum on trade'

### **Wednesday: Pots and perspectives**

Required Reading: Bowerstock, 'Centrifugal Force in Late Antique Historiography: Moving to the Periphery', Leitch, 'Reconstructing history through pottery: the contribution of Roman N African cookwares'

### **Thursday: What were living conditions like in the Roman empire? A perspective from osteology**

Required Reading: Scheidel, 'Physical wellbeing in the Roman world'

Additional: Scheidel, 'Slavery in the Roman economy'

### **Friday: Reconsidering the effects of economic collapse**

Required Reading: Gerrard, *The ruin of Roman Britain* (chapter 6)

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### **Week 4: Christianity - new elite power and language**

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#### **Monday: Symposium 2: Debating Constantine's conversion**

OP-ED ANALYSIS PAPER DUE

No reading summaries required

Additional Reading: Van Dam, 'The Many Conversions of the Emperor Constantine'; Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (chapter 9), Macmullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (excerpts); Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops* (chapter 4)

#### **Tuesday: A cultural transformation? The rise of Christianity**

Required Reading: Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* (ch I.15); Brown, 'The rise and function of the holy man'

Additional: Stark, *Rise of Christianity* (chapters 5, 6)

#### **Wednesday: Elites get on board: churches and bishops**

Required Reading: Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values* (excerpts)

Additional: Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (chapters 7, 8)

#### **Thursday: A new kind of Christian emperor**

Required Reading: Brown, *Power and Persuasion* (excerpts)

Additional: Geary, *Before France and Germany* (chapter 4)

#### **Friday: Two cities**

Required Reading: Augustine, *City of God* (excerpts); Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (chapter 4)

Additional: Zosimus (excerpts)

### **Week 5: Urban / elite transformation**

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#### **Monday: How did Rome, the city, work?**

Required Reading: Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople* (chapter: Rome)

Additional: Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople* (chapter: Constantinople)

#### **Tuesday: Cities and economics**

Required Reading: Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (chapter 3); Brandes and Haldon, 'Towns, Tax, and Transformation'

Additional: Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (chapter 6)

#### **Wednesday: Fleeing the cities: The rise of rural villas**

Required Reading: Bowes, *Houses and Society in the Later Roman Empire* (excerpts)

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### **Thursday: Did cities really 'decline'?**

Required Reading: Rogers, 'Late Roman Towns as Meaningful Places'

Additional: Kulikowski, 'The Late Roman City in Spain'

### **Friday: Beyond cities and villas: New kinds of elite power**

Required Reading: Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain* (chapter 5); Halsall, 'Archaeology and the late Roman frontier in Northern Gaul: The so-called "Föderatengräber" revisited'

Additional: Theuws, 'Grave Goods, Ethnicity, and the Rhetoric of Burial Rites in Late Antique Northern Gaul'

## **Week 6: How does it end?**

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### **Monday: Civil war and failure**

Required Reading: Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* (chapters 7, 8, 9)

Additional: Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars* (Introduction)

### **Tuesday: Justinian's sixth-century conquests**

Required Reading: Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* (chapters 10, 15)

### **Wednesday: Rome's suicide**

No reading (finish papers)

### **Thursday: Case study: Giving up on Rome in Britain**

No reading (finish papers)

### **Friday: Final exam and discussion**

FINAL EXAM PAPERS DUE

Open discussion: why did Rome fall, and why do we still care (and should we)?